

**Testimony Supporting  
HB 6374, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses  
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
March 2, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, and members of the committee. My name is Brandi Kennedy. I am an MSW Policy Practice graduate student at the UConn School of Social Work and for this academic year have been placed with The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence as a policy intern. Additionally, I work as a Family Violence Victim Advocate within the courts and I am speaking here today to urge your support of House Bill 6374.

Law reform and policy changes have brought about some necessary improvements to the way college campuses in Connecticut process sexual assault, intimate partner violence and stalking cases. However, much work remains to be done. This work involves providing secondary stakeholders a paradigm shift in knowledge and a deeper understanding of victim reactions to traumatic violent crimes that occur on college campuses as well as victim perception regarding how disclosures are handled.

Trauma is a heavy word; it is multi-faceted, unique and pervasive. The neurobiological impacts of sexual misconduct are significant and rewire the brain's defense circuitry. Connecticut needs improved sensitivity to the diversity and extent of victims' trauma responses reflected in policy. Sexual assault, intimate partner violence and stalking are intensely private crimes and are often reflected by social expectations and stigmas regarding gender roles, sexuality, victim shaming and affirmative consent. As The Every Voice Coalition has stated: you cannot solve an issue without fully understanding. House Bill 6374 seeks to not only protect but understand the voices of enrolled college students' in Connecticut and validate their experiences and needs in order to feel safe.

Some of the impacts of sexual misconduct on campuses include PTSD, a sense of shame, hypervigilance, irritability, anger, rumination, tendencies to isolate and detach, increased need for control, and an increase in academic problems and drop-out rates. These impacts lead to underreporting with many victims. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) only 20% of female student victims age 18-24 report to law enforcement and 90% of rapes at colleges are perpetuated by 3% of college men. An indicator that there is a real issue of repeat offenders. Additionally, 12% of female victims believed their abuse was not important enough to report.

Section one of HB 6374 strives to provide protections for students who report alleged sexual misconduct. Section two establishes a Council on Sexual Misconduct Climate Surveys. The Council would identify and approve one or more sexual misconduct climate surveys for colleges and universities to assess the campus climate around intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Furthermore, section three of the bill seeks to provide on-going and updated data regarding the climate surveys no later than six months after distribution and every two years

thereafter. This firsthand knowledge from primary stakeholders is fundamental to the betterment of evidence-based interventions in order to protect all of Connecticut's student and ensure their safety while enrolled within a Connecticut college or university.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

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